

PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS

Any interrupted operation of the critical sectors discussed in this report may disrupt the lives of those affected. Through the efforts of thousands of hardworking people across the country, tremendous progress has been made toward preventing such interruptions, but no responsible person can rule out the possibility that such interruptions could occur.

That being the case, communities and individuals across the country must be prepared with personal Y2K contingency plans. Y2K is no different from any other unexpected event for which we all take precautions, such as fires, floods, storms, and accidents. No one questions the wisdom of preparing for these unpredictable events, because they have the potential to disrupt our lives. Although we know it is coming, Y2K is another unpredictable event that may have life-altering consequences. Like fires, floods, storms, and accidents, Y2K requires an insurance policy against its unforeseen consequences. That insurance policy comes in the form of reasonable preparation.

The Committee has worked to provide the most accurate information possible on the Y2K problem and its probable effects. Where industries and government agencies have been less than candid, the Committee has taken every possible measure to extract the necessary information to satisfy the public's right to know and

to enable reasonable personal contingency planning.

Despite the Committee's efforts, dissatisfaction remains with the information provided by the government and other sources and reported by the media. The fact is, however, that precise information about the effects of Y2K is simply not available. No one knows exactly what will happen when the century date change arrives. There will almost certainly be isolated disruptions domestically, and more widespread disruptions abroad, but no one can predict where those disruptions will arise and how serious they will be. The information is either nonexistent or cannot be gathered in a uniform or cohesive manner.

**"IF YOU'RE GOING TO
STOCKPILE ANYTHING,
STOCKPILE INFOR-
MATION."**

--SENATOR BENNETT

This is why it is important for communities and individuals to take charge of their own Y2K lives, and to do it in responsible ways. Prudent preparations for Y2K are exactly those that should be undertaken by every household in anticipation of any type of emergency. Such preparations can mitigate the effects of disruptions in critical services.

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

During 1999, the Committee recognized that most of the country was relying on media reports to determine how best to prepare for Y2K. Unfortunately, these media re-

ports contained conflicting information about the Y2K preparedness of various sectors, which led to conflicting information about the need for preparation. Community-based groups dedicated to emergency preparations universally complained about the lack of sufficient and reliable information upon which to base reasonable Y2K preparedness planning.

In response to these concerns, the Committee conducted a hearing on community Y2K preparedness and the media on May 25, 1999. During that hearing, the Committee explored the issue of community-based and individual Y2K preparedness, as well as the related role the media plays in providing information that enables communities and individuals to make reasonable Y2K preparations. The hearing underscored the importance of community planning for this unknowable event and sent a message to various media outlets about the craving for information on Y2K.

The Committee also made available to each member of the Senate information about the Y2K problem and an outline for conducting community meetings on the issue. Several members of the Committee have already held such events.

From the executive branch, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has issued a preparedness guideline titled "Y2K & You: A New Horizon." This document can be found at www.fema.gov/y2k.

In addition, in May 1999, the President's Y2K Council began holding a

series of "Y2K Community Conversations" in numerous locations around the country. The purpose of these Y2K Community Conversations is to support and encourage the efforts of government officials, business leaders, and interested citizens to meet the Y2K challenge in their own communities and to share information about their progress.

Finally, a number of states and local governments have issued Y2K preparedness guidelines for their citizens. Copies of such guidelines can be obtained from local officials.

COMMUNITY EFFORTS

In every state across the country, in nearly every community, a Y2K preparedness group has come together to share information about the Y2K-readiness of their communities and to prepare for Y2K together. This type of community approach allows these groups to focus on Y2K from the perspective of their particular situations with, for example, their local utilities and their local governments.

Many of these community-based Y2K preparedness groups have drawn inspiration from preparedness guidelines issued by FEMA, the American Red Cross, the Cassandra Project, and a host of other organizations. Some community-based Y2K preparedness groups have taken additional steps to draft preparedness plans specific to their communities. These groups have undertaken substantial outreach ef-

forts to provide citizens with information about Y2K.

INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS

It is not possible for the Committee to provide specific Y2K preparedness guidelines for individuals because the situation of each individual is unique. The best advice the Committee can give is that individuals must take charge of their own Y2K lives by seeking out information, asking questions, and selecting preparedness guidelines that are most relevant to their situations. The Committee can provide the following general guidelines:

- Be Informed: Ask your electric, gas, water, and wastewater utilities about their Y2K status, including what kind of testing they have performed and what contingency plans they have to ensure they can continue providing you with heat, light, and water. If you are dissatisfied with their responses, take the steps you deem necessary to ensure that you can weather several days without these utilities. Ask your local officials what the police, fire, and emergency medical services have done to prepare for Y2K, and post their non-911 direct dial emergency numbers.
- Be an Educated Consumer: Contact the manufacturers of your household appliances to verify the Y2K status of those appliances. Check with your doctor, pharmacist, broker, grocer, and others who provide you with essential services about what they have done to prepare for Y2K and how they plan to continue providing you their services.
- Supplies: Every household should have on hand supplies for any emergency that might arise, including Y2K. At a minimum, these supplies include flashlights and batteries, warm blankets, sufficient nonperishable canned and packaged food items to last several days, and any other supplies deemed necessary by that household for its particular situation. If you are dependent upon medication, consult your physician if you are concerned about any Y2K-related disruption in supply.
- Finances: The financial services industry is well-prepared, and your financial institution is still the safest place to keep your money. A few commonsense measures on your part will protect you against any unforeseen glitches, such as billing errors. Visit or call your financial institutions to learn about their Y2K plans. Save receipts and get paper copies of bank and loan statements and other financial transactions. Monitor these documents for several months into the New Year for any possible Y2K-related errors. Talk to your employer about steps taken to address Y2K vulnerabilities in the payroll system. Take Y2K readiness into account when making any investments.

- Travel Smart: If you plan to travel over the new year, obtain written confirmation of your reservations directly from the provider as well as from your travel agent. Factor Y2K into your travel plans much as you would any other disruptions, such as bad weather or overbooking that would cause you to experience delays. If you are travelling abroad, check the State Department for Y2K travel alerts.
- Beware of Scams. Con artists are already exploiting Y2K fears. Be wary of goods and services touted as Y2K guaranteed. Beware of anyone attempting to sell you unnecessary products such as massive food supplies, dubious types of water treatment kits, or other Y2K "personal preparedness" items. Never give out personal financial information over the phone unless you initiate the call and are sure the person you

call is legitimate. Report any attempts to solicit this information to the police.

CONCERNS

The Committee remains concerned that inadequate media coverage of the Y2K problem or unwarranted "hype" may lead to unnecessary panic. Such panic has the real potential to lead to problems that may well exceed the severity of the Y2K problem, including runs on financial institutions and shortages of food, medication, and other essential supplies. The Committee strongly believes that responsible citizens should begin now to educate themselves about the degree to which they need to prepare, and to begin making their purchases now, over the course of the next few months, instead of waiting until the last week of 1999.